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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [LT](#)  
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: FRESH ATTACKS ON HOMES OF GOL MINISTER AND  
OPPOSITION LEADER

REF: A) MASERU 340; B) MASERU 337; C) MASERU 94; D) MASERU 178

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1. (U) SUMMARY: Only four days after the June 10 attack on the residences of two government ministers, unidentified gunmen carried out a new attack on the residence of Mothojoa Metsing, Minister of Communications, Science and Technology, on the night of June 14. Post sources indicated that the attackers fired weapons randomly inside and outside the home and escaped in the Minister's official vehicle, commandeered at gunpoint shortly before the attack. Metsing and his family were home at the time, but uninjured. On the same night, unknown assailants sprayed the residence of Thomas Thabane, leader of the opposition All Basotho Convention (ABC) political party, with automatic gunfire. Thabane was also uninjured. This spate of mysterious attacks on political figures, similar to attacks over the past year and taking place in the background of an ongoing SADC initiative to promote dialogue between the governing LCD and opposition parties, is a highly disconcerting and troubling development. END SUMMARY.

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Another Minister's Residence Attacked  
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2. (U) According to the Office of the Commander of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF), a chauffeur driving Minister of Communications Mothojoa Metsing's official vehicle was returning to the minister's residence in Maseru West on the evening of June 14, after dropping off two bodyguards assigned to his personal protective detail. At approximately 8:10 p.m., five gunmen stopped and commandeered the Minister's vehicle at gunpoint and instructed the driver to travel to Metsing's home. Upon their arrival, the group disarmed two LDF guards who later stated that they were initially unaware of anyone in the vehicle other than the driver. The gunmen proceeded to fire automatic rifles randomly at the residence's exterior windows and walls. Several attackers are reported to have entered the house, firing automatic weapons inside. Minister Metsing was reportedly in his residence at the time of the attack, but was uninjured.

3. (U) The assailants left the residence in Minister Metsing's official vehicle. The police were immediately notified, and a search for the vehicle ensued. Just before 9:00 p.m., a fire brigade unit of the Lesotho Mounted Police identified the ministerial vehicle on a highway east of Maseru and attempted to stop the carjackers. The gunmen opened fire on the fire truck

and forced it to stop (no reported injuries). Police found the Minister's vehicle later that evening abandoned on the outskirts of Maseru.

¶4. (U) A June 15 press release issued by Lesotho's Ministry of Communications on the incident reads as follows: (informal translation from Sesotho)

BEGIN TEXT:

The family of the Minister of Communications, Science and Technology and government spokesperson Mothojoa Metsing was attacked on the evening of Thursday, 14 June, 2007.

According to a report by the Minister's driver, five gunmen traveling in an Isuzu pick-up bearing known registration numbers (of which the owner is also known), blocked the Minister's car which was traveling back to the residence after dropping off the Minister's bodyguards at their homes. They tied the hands of the driver, gagged him, and drove to the Minister's residence where they fired randomly at the house.

No one was injured in this incident, but the Minister's residence is riddled with bullets.

15 June, 2007

END TEXT.

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The Thabane Factor  
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¶5. (U) In a separate incident also on the evening of June 14, unknown gunmen also reportedly attacked the exterior of the Maseru home of leading political opposition figure Thomas Thabane with automatic rifles. On June 15, Thabane, a former

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senior minister who left the governing LCD party to form the ABC in October 2006, claimed on a private radio station broadcast that gunmen had fired at the windows and walls of his home the previous evening. He said that no one was injured, and called for police to investigate the matter. On air, Thabane stressed that his supporters should allow the judicial process to take its course and urged ABC members not to interfere with ongoing investigations.

¶6. (SBU) On June 14, prior to the attack on Thabane's house, the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) told Charge that the ABC leader had called her to complain that authorities had earlier that day disarmed his personal bodyguards despite, he claimed, their legal and permitted possession of firearms. On June 15, the Minister of Communications cancelled a scheduled meeting with the UNRC, stating that the GOL was convening for an emergency session, but provided no further details.

¶7. (U) Law enforcement authorities and the LDF responded to these events by mounting roadblocks on all major roads to Maseru on the morning of June 15. This move was criticized on local radio call-in shows, a key barometer of public opinion, by callers complaining that the lengthy searches for illegal weapons resulted in morning traffic grinding to a standstill without producing any public safety benefit.

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A String of Similar Incidents  
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¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: The brazen June 14 attack on the Minister Metsing's vehicle and residence was substantially similar to the June 10 attacks, except that a great deal more damage was done

to Metsing's residence. These recent attacks bear similarly to a November 2006 armed assault which killed a Dutch aid worker at the residence of then Minister of Trade Malie, as well as to a March 2007 attack on a home owned by Minister of Tourism Ntsinyi and occupied by two American aid workers. While mere speculation, some observers postulate that the attack on Thabane's home may have been retribution by a pro-government group for the attacks on GOL residences during the week. While the Kingdom of Lesotho has shown many signs of increasing political maturity, such as improved judicial independence, the current attacks, taking place in the background of an ongoing SADC initiative to promote dialogue between the governing LCD and opposition parties, represent a highly disconcerting and troubling development. END SUMMARY.

MURPHY